

FCC Consumer Advisory

Using Your Wireless Phone on Airplanes

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) is considering proposals that may eventually allow you to use your own cell phone or wireless data device on airplanes after take off. Currently, cell phone users generally are permitted to use their phones before takeoff and after landing. FCC rules currently ban cell phone use after a plane has taken off because of potential interference to cellular phone networks on the ground. In addition, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has rules prohibiting in-flight cell phone use because of potential interference to navigation and aircraft systems.

The FCC has proposed new rules that would allow you to use your cellular and other wireless devices in airborne aircraft as a means to increase communication options available to the traveling public and to increase communication options to public safety personnel. The FCC cautioned, however, that regardless of any steps it ultimately takes, the use of cellular and other wireless devices aboard aircraft remain subject to the rules and policies of the FAA and aircraft operators. The FCC is coordinating closely with the FAA to ensure that FCC rules and policies complement the FAA's efforts and address issues unique to wireless service providers subject to the FCC's authority.

What Is the FCC Proposing?

Among its proposals, the FCC is seeking public comment on whether to permit the airborne operation of "off the shelf" wireless handsets and other devices under the following conditions:

- The device operates at its lowest power setting under control of a "pico cell," which is a very small specialized cellular base station installed onboard the aircraft; and
- The operation does not interfere with on-ground users.

Many passenger airplanes are now equipped with special seatback-mounted phones that enable passengers to make air-to-ground calls. The FCC has recently approved rules that will allow airlines to offer high-speed Internet service over the radio frequencies currently used by these seatback phones.

It should be noted that any use of personal electronic devices, including all phones and other portable electronic devices (PEDs) like pagers, blackberries, portable music players, video games, and computers will remain subject to the FAA's authority over safety of flight.



All of the proposed rule changes are aimed at increasing the communication options for wireless users – in this case, airborne connectivity – while ensuring there is no increased risk of harmful interference to cellular systems on the ground. The ultimate objective is to give consumers the choice to use their own wireless devices during flight.

For further information, visit http://hraunfoss.fcc.gov/edocs_public/attachmatch/DOC-255246A1.doc or contact the FCC's Consumer Call Center at 1-888-CALL-FCC (1-888-225-5322) voice, or 1-888-TELL-FCC (1-888-835-5322) TTY.

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09/22/05* - cpb

